8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

571 573 *oblige*. In the same way, the old men's clique operates.

For here in the old men's house, the countryman's way of life exerts its strongest sway upon him. It is the 'parliament' of his fellows. The topics brought up and debated upon are much the same from year to year and place to place. Agriculture, perhaps, comes first. Times of sowing, reaping and harvesting are debated. Prices are compared, innovations tested. Traditional methods receive their strongest support here, in the web of legend, proverb and reference to the past the speakers throw round them.

573 621 66 Much of the community's relation to the outer world takes its form here, determined in the old men's argument and agreement. In late years this has come to be called 'politics'. Petitions for relief road work, for expansion of agricultural prize schemes, most, in fact, of the business of the County Council and its committees originates on the side of local community in the discussions of the old men's *cuaird*. It is here, too, that the community reaches unanimity in party voting. In Rynamona, for instance, it is felt that the interest of all demands that there should be no dissension on the score of politics. Consequently, even O'Halloran, the 'drawer down', whose private views leaned in a different direction from those of the villagers, begged that no word of his heterodoxy be allowed to reach the ears of Rynamona. "I wouldn't want

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

them to think I wasn't with them", he put it. No wonder, then, that the political allegiances of whole countrysides are constant factors in Irish politics.

The community reaches agreement upon its internal affairs, too, through the old men's discussions. It is in just this type of activity that one can at last put one's finger upon that nebulous force among men: public opinion. That force is not implemented; it is merely the power of gossip and censure; only in critical days, as in the time of land agitation, can it rise to action, as a last resort, and win itself an international name: the boycott. But it is none the less powerful.

But, in rural Ireland, the group through which this power flows serves another function which cannot be disassociated from its role as the seat of public opinion. The members of the old men's *cuaird* are the living repositories of tradition. In communities, such as Luogh, where the Irish language lingers on, many of them are *seanachaidhthe* or story-tellers. Among them the ancient repertories of legend, saga and folk-tale still find an audience. That the exponents of fairy-lore have always been, and are still, old men and old women, is no social accident. For the pattern of local life retains its continuity and preserves what it can of its conformity with the past through them.

But what of the young men, those who have not attained full status? They do not attend at the old men's house; they take no part in the deliberations

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

It is not the formal system of local and national governments which exerts the most control over the behavior of Inis Beag islanders, but rather the church whose clerical representatives impose supernatural sanctions more potent than the threat of extermination. Indeed, because of the marked theocratic tendencies of the church in the Republic, and the all-powerful political role played by the clergy in Inis Beag, it is tempting to label the church a formal agency of social control. The island certainly comprises a primary group in the sociological sense, with its diminutive size and population, and the sanctions imposed by the folk on one another sometimes rival in effectiveness those of the parish priest and curate.

The widespread peasant trait of dependence together with hostility toward government is most pronounced in Inis Beag. Aid in a variety of forms constantly is sought and even expected as an obligation, or "right," of the government by the islanders (especially since nativism engendered by the Gaelic Revival has made Inis Beag "the darling of the Gaeltacht," to quote a Dublin scholar who is a bitter foe of the language movement), but they are either apathetic or antagonistic toward the local and central governments. When asked to account for their anti-government sentiment, the folk of Inis Beag cite most often the commonplace nepotism and corruption practiced by functionaries, the slight differences between the platforms of the major Irish parties—Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, the promises made by politicians which seldom are kept when they achieve office, the misapplication of programs once implemented, the inadequacy of government services, the burden of increasing taxation and inflation, and "foolish" government projects in Inis Beag, more often than not instituted without consulting the islanders.

Today, the folk seldom pay heed to election promises, but once their votes were commanded by politicians who put forth grandiose plans for the betterment of local conditions—such as lengthening the present jetty or constructing another to accommodate the steamer, and connecting the fresh water lake with the sea to form a sheltered harbor for trawlers—which never were realized. Popular subjects of conversation are the shortcomings of the postal, medical, transport, and other services, and the steady increase of taxes—on stout and tobacco in particular—and the price of imported turf. Among the government projects criticized by the islanders are seaweed drying structures and lime kilns which seldom or never have been used, road improvements made where they were not needed and not made where they were needed, and the new school and jetty whose sites were misplaced by civil servants who failed to seek local advice as to the vagaries of wind and tide. The school is in danger of becoming inundated with sand from the common land, and is near the strand where activities distract the attention of the pupils; and the pier is not located in the most protected position that the coastline affords. Anti-government feeling is but a part of a much broader anti-authority configuration, which extends to the clergy, to high status folk, and even to parent-child and sibling relationships within the family. It has been for many centuries a component of Irish basic personality structure and has had momentous repercussions on the course of Irish history.

The political apathy of the islanders is revealed in their voting behavior and their knowledge of political figures and issues. Election of councillors to the county council takes place every two years, and election of members to the Dail

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226 months; less than a dozen crews now fish regularly, and most fish are consumed locally rather than exported. Government subsidies of many
434 sorts and remittances from relatives who have emigrated supplement the
657 cash economy. The government further aids the islanders by not collect-
[651] ing "rates" and by setting low rents on land. Income information is as
12 difficult to come by as data on sex, disputes, and pagan religious retentions, since the people do not wish to jeopardize their unemployment benefits (most of them receive the "dole") and old age pensions and fear taxation in the future, they are secretive about sources and amounts of income.

626 More important than the formal political structure of Inis Beag are the local informal system and social control techniques of gossip,
674 ridicule, satire, and the like. Crime is rare in Inis Beag, and there are no "guards" stationed there. The island is seldom visited by politicians,
829 and many inhabitants are either apathetic or antagonistic toward the
641 county and national governments. Those asked to account for their
• [66] antigovernment attitude cite widespread nepotism and corruption among officials, the slight differences between the platforms of the two major parties, and "foolish" government schemes in Inis Beag—usually instituted without consulting the islanders. Government aid is sought and
[657] [746] even expected as a "right," but it is seldom considered adequate. Taxation in any form, especially of tobacco and stout, is bitterly opposed.

626 The informal political system is dominated by the curate, the
793 "headmaster" of the national school, and a self-appointed local "king."
[875] In the past, the amount of influence exerted by curates has varied; some
[624] have been concerned mostly with fulfilling spiritual responsibilities, while others have attacked by sermon, threat, and even physical action such activities as courting, dancing, visiting, gossiping, and drinking
793 spirits. Anticlerical sentiment (seldom manifested in overt acts) is as
829 strong as, or stronger than, its antigovernment counterpart. The clergy are said to interfere too much in secular affairs, to live too "comfortably," to be absent from the island too often, and to act overly aloof and
[626] supercilious. The most outspoken anticlerics assert that curates have employed informers, allocated indulgences, withheld the sacraments, and placed curses ("reading the Bible at") in their efforts to regulate the
875 secular life of Inis Beag. The headmaster, appointed and rigidly super-
571 vised by the parish priest and curate, presides over social events and serves as an adviser to the islanders in many matters, in addition to carrying out his official duties.

571 Inis Beag lacks a class system, and the status symbols which affect